

JANUARY 2026

# CO-LAB BETA: MEASURING WHAT MATTERS MOST

## FINAL IMPACT REPORT FOR BETA COHORTS

Presented to ECMC Group



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# Why Co-Lab Matters Now

**In 2022, over 27,000 young adults in the Twin Cities were disconnected from school and work, representing 8.4% of the region's incoming workforce.\***

**Statewide, this disconnection costs Minnesota an estimated \$350 million annually.\* While these young adults are eager to contribute, they face systemic barriers such as incomplete education, limited networks, unstable employment, and prior justice system involvement.**

**The Co-Lab model is a 12-week education and workforce initiative co-created by young adults and backed by data. In 2025, Co-Lab piloted two cohorts: ages 16–19 and 18–24. Co-Lab blends career exploration, personal development, and wraparound support.**

**By bridging the gap between talent and opportunity, Co-Lab enables employers to tap into a motivated, often overlooked workforce while supporting young adults in thriving both at work and in life.**

This report highlights immediate outcomes and insights from the Co-Lab model at Saint Paul College (Saint Paul) and at Urban Ventures (Minneapolis). Based on promising results, ECMC Group renewed funding to support three cohorts annually over the next three years in partnership with Saint Paul Promise / Wilder Foundation. This continued investment marks a step toward reshaping the narrative around talent pipelines and workforce readiness in under-resourced communities.

 \*Measure of America, *Youth Disconnection in America Report*, 2024.

Data reflects young adults ages 16–24.

# Investing Smarter In Young Adult Success

## Recruiting talent is costly, and keeping talent is hard.

Co-Lab expands the talent pipeline by preparing young adults to explore high-demand careers and develop skills employers value. Co-Lab graduates emerge with a stronger sense of belonging and belief in their ability to shape what comes next.



**\$4,700**

The average cost of recruiting talent in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

**\$17,500**

The cost of replacing early-career talent can cost up to 40% of their salary.<sup>2</sup>

**20%**

Quarterly turnover rate for young adults in Minnesota.<sup>3</sup>

**Co-creation with young adults led to strong gains in belonging, confidence, commitment, and resilience. All are linked to postsecondary education enrollment, completion, and long-term employment success.**

With an investment of less than \$5,000 per participant, including close to \$2,000 in direct payments, Co-Lab offers a promising model for advancing career readiness and personal growth.

1. Society of Human Resource Management, 2022.

2. Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 2022 data.

3. Gallup Workplace, 2024; Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2024.

# Co-Lab Delivers Value Now

These outputs offer a snapshot of Co-Lab's early impact on engagement, learning, and collaboration.

- **Strong participation and retention**, with 80% of cohort participants (or "NorthStars") attending consistently, driven by trust and relevant content.
- **Future Success Plans** were completed by all NorthStars, with 93% finishing the program with clear education, career, and life goals for the next 3–6 months.
- **Sustained engagement** through steady attendance, 500+ daily survey responses, and high interest in career pathway sessions.
- **Robust partner involvement**, with 62 partners contributing sessions and site visits; 100% indicated they would return.
- **Momentum from the margins**: 21% of NorthStars were neither in school nor working. 14.6% of NorthStars enrolled in, applied to, or transferred colleges during and after Co-Lab (self-reported).
- **Real-world skill-building**: NorthStars earned 45+ IT certifications and 20+ Mental Health First Aid Certificates.

50%

Of NorthStars reported making "strong" connections with both peers and partners during the program

6 out of 8

Career clusters\* saw increased interest from NorthStars by the end of Co-Lab compared to the beginning

4.67 / 5

Was the average overall program rating given by NorthStars

\*Career clusters included Business & Entrepreneurship, Construction & Trades, Creative Industries, Environment & Outdoor work, Education & Youth Work, Government & Public Service, Healthcare, Technology & IT.

# What's Emerging: Insights To Build On

Early indicators show that Co-Lab fosters community, strengthens aspirations, and generates powerful learning moments for NorthStars.

- **Growing confidence:** NorthStars report a statistically significant 13.6% increase in confidence about their future and decision-making from the start of the program.
- **Clearer pathways:** Young adults shift from “I don’t know yet” to identifying specific next steps for continuing their education and exploring careers in high-growth industries.
- **Belonging and connection:** Strong relationships with peers and adults lay the foundation for learning and personal growth, reflected in a 15.9% increase in reported belonging.
- **Greater comfort with support systems:** Over 40 in-person mental health sessions were accessed, reflecting increased use of culturally responsive care alongside career and basic need supports.
- **Ownership and agency:** NorthStars co-create the experience, shape improvements, and take initiative in their learning.

60.8%

Of NorthStars stated “Career Connections” and “A Boost in Confidence” as the most important takeaways from Co-Lab

91.3%

Of NorthStars reported Co-Lab helped them feel ready for their next step “Quite a lot” or “Greatly”





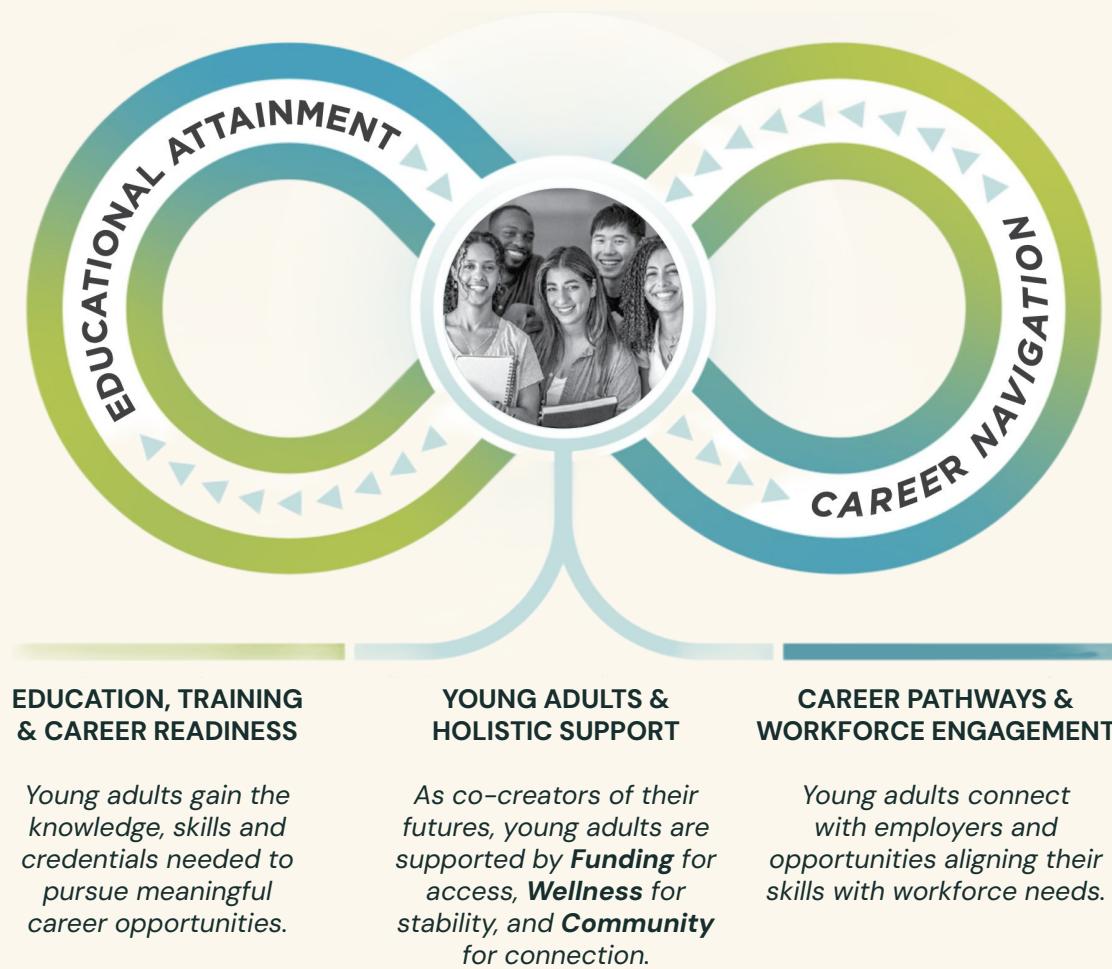
# Evaluation Strategy



# Testing a Co-Created Model

We tested the Co-Lab Beta model with two cohorts of 24 young adults each, engaged for 12 weeks.

**The Co-Lab Model is a dynamic hub where young adults access support for education, career growth, and wellness—all in one space, created by and with young adults.**



# How Co-Lab Drives Change

We tested Co-Lab's theory of change over the course of two 12-week program cohorts.

## CO-LAB'S CORE HYPOTHESIS

**IF** young adults engage in a high-relational, co-created space that provides career connected learning, wraparound supports, and meaningful decision-making power,

**THEN** they will build the confidence, skills, and direction needed to pursue strong postsecondary pathways, succeed in the workforce, and shape more responsive support systems.

**AS A RESULT**, our region will benefit from more engaged young adults, access to a better-prepared talent pipeline, and greater alignment between talent development and employer needs.



## HOW THIS HAPPENS

- ✓ **Whole-Person Readiness:** Co-Lab supports mental and physical health, financial wellness, and community connection to help young adults fully engage.
- ✓ **Clearer Future Pathways:** Young adults explore high-growth sectors with 1:1 career navigation, grounded in Minnesota's labor market data.
- ✓ **Co-Creation in Practice:** Young adults shape the experience at every stage, keeping Co-Lab relevant and aligned with their goals.

# Measuring What Matters

**Co-Lab's Impact Measurement Framework was designed to serve as a practical, strategic tool for understanding and guiding the impact of Co-Lab Beta.**

It tracks how Co-Lab supports both personal transformation and systemic change, enables timely adaptations, and builds a case for long-term investment. At its heart, it is driven by the experiences of young adults.

It applies a balanced evaluation strategy rooted in learning, accountability, and equity.

Rather than trying to “measure everything”, we focus on the data that helps us understand *what's working, for whom, and why*.

**We measure with people.** The data collection tools are designed to be participatory, trauma-informed, and co-created with young adults.

## Evaluation Objectives:

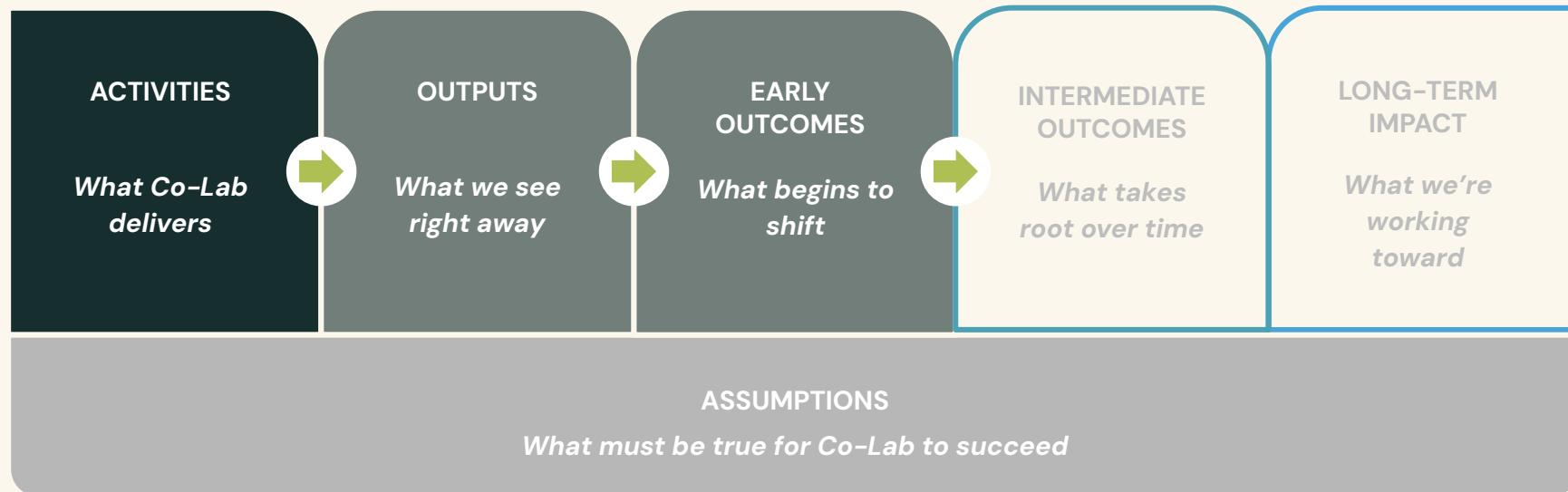
- Track individual growth and system-wide change across time.
- Inform program improvements in real time through embedded feedback loops.
- Build the business case for scaling Co-Lab using data and stories.
- Embed trauma-informed, engaging, and participatory methods throughout the measurement process.



# Tracking What Works

The Co-Lab Beta model creates change through a series of connected stages, mapping how program activities translate into short-term and medium-term outcomes, and the potential for lasting systemic impact.

This report focuses on how Co-Lab led to the outputs and some early outcomes. It also outlines the foundation for longitudinal learning and benchmarking, including the data collection tools developed to support future evaluation of long-term impact.



# What We Tested

For Co-Lab Beta 2025, we tested key elements of format, supports, timing, and relevance to understand what works and for whom.

LEARNING FOCUS	MEASUREMENT FORMAT
FORMAT & DURATION	Retention rates, session attendance, participant and partner feedback on the 12-week structure.
WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS	Reported satisfaction, frequency of use, continued engagement after program completion.
FINANCIAL INCENTIVE IMPACT	Motivation to participate, completion of milestone goals, engagement beyond compensation.
PROGRAMMING RELEVANCE	Clarity on goals, career interest shifts, alignment with regional workforce needs.
PARTICIPANT AGENCY	Sense of belonging, strength of peer and adult relationships, participant reflections.
LEADERSHIP & CO-CREATION	Participant input in design, use of feedback loops, and changes made as a result.
EDUCATION & CAREER PATHWAYS	Enrollment and completion data, number of pathway entries, engagement with career supports.
PARTNER ENGAGEMENT	Number of partner touchpoints (e.g. site visits, panels), referrals, and partner feedback.
SCALABILITY & SUSTAINABILITY	Partner interest in expansion or funding, feasibility of adapting the model in other settings.

# How We Collected Data

We used a mix of participatory, creative, and program data tracking methods to collect feedback from young adults and partners, and track progress at the individual and system levels.



<b>599</b>	<b>Participant Surveys Responses</b> Quick daily surveys to gauge session clarity, relevance, and connection.
<b>125</b>	<b>Co-Lab Intake and Exit Survey Responses*</b> Comprehensive reflections capturing participant satisfaction, goal progression, and program experience, including 18 longitudinal surveys.
<b>188</b>	<b>Story-Based Reflections</b> Using arts-based activities to collect personal narratives through visioning exercises, goal setting, and personal reflection prompts.
<b>5</b>	<b>Young Adult-Led Feedback Activities</b> Opportunities for participants to design and lead feedback moments that shape program adjustments.
<b>42</b>	<b>Partner Survey Responses</b> To gather partner impressions of collaboration, participant engagement quality, and ideas for improvement. Collected after their session and at the 3-month mark.
<b>1,200+</b>	<b>Administrative Data Points</b> Ongoing tracking of attendance, completion of participant "Future Success Plans", use of wraparound supports, and referrals.

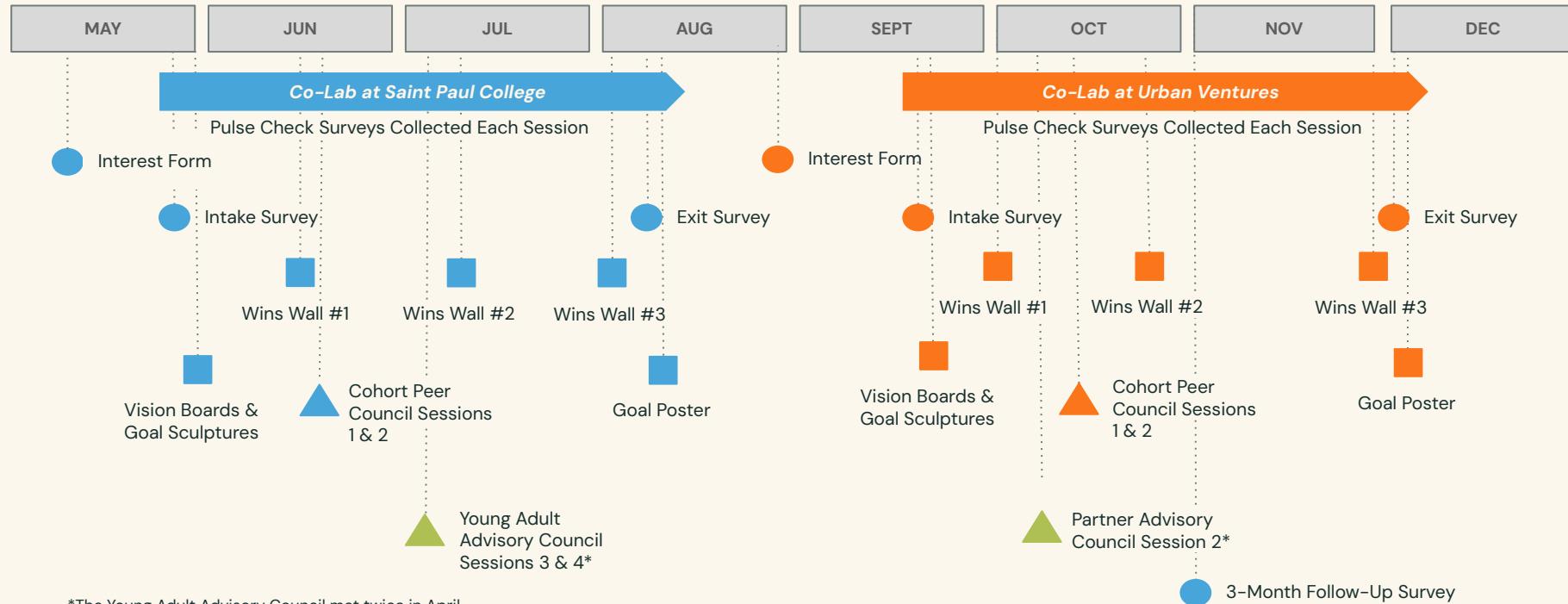
\*The number of surveys collected is greater than the total number of NorthStars in the program (48) because some participants completed the intake survey and left Co-Lab during the first two weeks. This data point also includes 18 longitudinal survey responses, 5 from Co-Lab Alpha 2024 and 13 from Co-Lab at Saint Paul College.

# Data Collection Timeline 2025

## KEY

- Survey Collection
- Creative Collection Method
- Advisory Council Session

- Saint Paul College Cohort
- Urban Ventures Cohort
- Overall Program

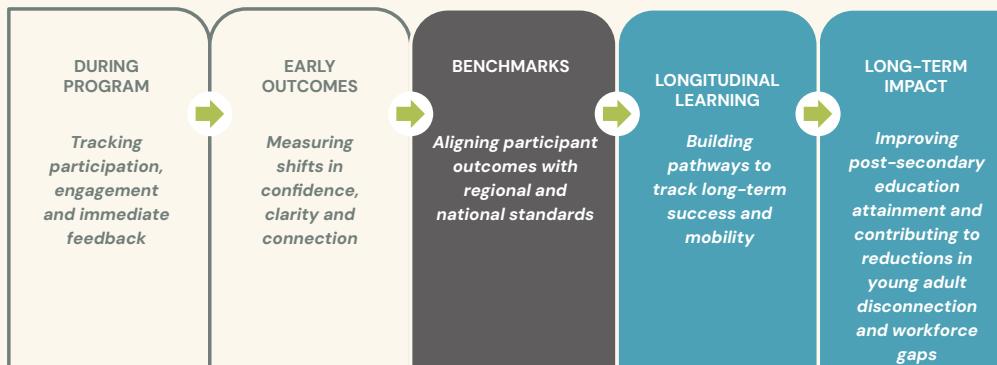


\*The Young Adult Advisory Council met twice in April 2025 to design Co-Lab. The Partner Advisory Council convened in May to provide early input.

# Building Towards Benchmarks & Longitudinal Learning

**Longitudinal data collection at the 3-, 6-, and 12-month intervals is underway.** While early findings point to positive trends, a fuller understanding of long-term impact will emerge as this data is collected and analyzed.

**The Co-Lab Impact Measurement Framework includes strategies to align participant outcomes with broader systems benchmarks and to establish pathways for future longitudinal tracking.**



## Notes on Long-Term Data Collection

- Long-term impact typically refers to outcomes measured 10 or more years after participation. In many evaluations, metrics dip in the medium term before rebounding later, making it essential to track change over time. Currently, Co-Lab collects post-program data up to one year, reflecting short-term outcomes.
- Much of the longitudinal data relies on self-reported data through survey responses. To report statistical significance in impact reporting, Co-Lab must aim for 50-70% response rate to the surveys\*.

\*As Co-Lab's alumni network grows, the survey response rate can decrease and maintain statistical significance due to the larger population size.



# Insights & Results

# Inside This Report

This report presents emerging insights into Co-Lab's impact. Further analysis and supporting data are included in the appendices.

## In This Section

- Young Adult Co-Creation
- What Sets Co-Lab Apart
  - Insight: Career Clarity
  - Insight: Education Pathways
- Deeper Look: Trusting Relationships
  - Insight: Confidence and Community
  - Insight: Connections to Professionals
- Deeper Look: Responsive Structure
  - Insight: Listening to Trends
  - Insight: Engagement and Relevance
- Deeper Look: Whole-Person Focus
  - Insight: Mental Health
  - Insight: Attendance
- NorthStar Journeys

## In the Appendix

- Contextual Data
- Co-Lab Design Elements
- Cohorts At A Glance
  - Cohort Setting, Timing, Age
  - Cohort Demographic Data
  - Partner Engagement
- Testing Design
  - Cohort Best Fit
  - Welcoming Environments
  - Session Engagement
- Deeper Looks: Age Experiences, Recruitment, Compensation, Interest Areas, Pathways, Vision Boards, Roadmaps, Values.
- Indicators and Data Collection Tools



# Understanding Co-Lab's Impact

Co-Lab Beta 2025 demonstrated how a relational, young adult-led model creates meaningful shifts in confidence, clarity, and connection for young adults. These shifts support re-engagement with education and help young adults take concrete steps toward career pathways.



# Co-Lab is Created By And With Young Adults

**Co-Lab's most powerful differentiators come from its co-creation with young adults from under-resourced communities.**

Over the past two years, more than 80 young people have helped shape the model through the Young Adult Advisory Council, Cohort Councils, daily feedback, and creative data collection.

Co-creation was woven in from the very beginning, shaping how the program was designed, delivered, and evaluated.



**In 2025, at each step of the way, young adult voices were sought out and listened to:**

**10**

Young Adult Advisory Council members co-created the program over four, 2.5 hour workshops.

**10**

Cohort representatives selected by their peers (five per cohort), shaped the last four weeks of programming, provided additional insights and evaluated Co-Lab.

**26**

Real-time adjustments made to the program based on young adult feedback.

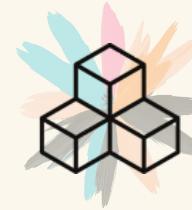
# What Sets Co-Lab Apart



## Trusting Relationships

**Connection is not a byproduct — it's a core component of Co-Lab.**

Building relationships and community requires time and intentionality from program leaders, partners, and young adults. When young adults feel connected to each other and to professionals, they have the foundation to learn openly and embrace curiosity.



## Responsive Structure

**Co-Lab's design meets young adults where they are.**

Through a balance of consistency and flexibility, Co-Lab offers a structure that is adaptive to the moment. Through some trial and error, it became evident that clear, yet responsive, expectations provide stability and safety for a positive learning environment.



## Whole-Person Focus

**Young adults show up most fully when their basic needs, aspirations, and sense of purpose are met at the same time.**

Compensation and wellness supports signal Co-Lab's intent of addressing basic needs and fueling aspirations. Just as importantly, co-creation gives young adults real decision-making power. They shape their experience, not just participate in it.

# Co-Lab Moves Young Adults Forward

Alone, each element of what makes Co-Lab unique yields positive impact. Together, trusting relationships, a responsive structure, and a whole-person focus move young adults forward.

**The forward momentum looks different across individual NorthStars. For some, Co-Lab inspired a shift in focus for their college degree. For others, it ignited hope in even considering college and pursuing a career, not just a job.**

Co-Lab intentionally fostered relationships as a basis for learning and exploration. The program structure provided consistency while remaining flexible to the young adults' needs and interests. Finally, Co-Lab acknowledged the whole person NorthStars brought with them, framing their experiences as strengths rather than barriers.



# Enhancing Clarity On Career Choices

Co-Lab's focus on career exploration, exposure, and navigation creates meaningful opportunities for young adults with limited access to growth. This approach has led to increased clarity around their career pathways.\*

The data shows that participants generally move from "*I don't know yet*" → "*I have a direction*" → "*I'm taking specific steps*".

Quantitative metrics reinforce this finding. On a scale from 1, "*not at all*", to 5, "*greatly*", NorthStars rated Co-Lab help in making them feel ready for what's next at 4.48, compared to 3.75 at the beginning of the program.

**Why this matters:** Clarity in **where** young adults want to go is an early step toward action.

*"I would like to walk away from the Co-Lab having a better idea of what I want my future to look like and the steps I will need to take to get there as far as my career."*



*"I can confidently say that I've narrowed my career choices down to two, a significant difference from the number I had before starting Co-Lab."*



*"One personal goal I'm working on is learning to give myself grace. I tend to be very hard on myself, and when things don't go as planned, I sometimes let that discourage me from accomplishing what I set out to do. A professional goal I'm focusing on is securing an internship for the summer of 2026, and I've already started applying to several opportunities."*

**One Co-Lab Saint Paul College NorthStar**

\*The intake, exit, and 3-month follow-up (for Saint Paul College NorthStars only, due to cohort timing) captured career clarity and goal setting for quantitative and qualitative analysis. The vision boards, sculpture goals, and 6-month posters provide additional qualitative inputs for understanding goals and clarity.

# Re-Engaging With Education Pathways

Many NorthStars enter Co-Lab with the mindset that college is not for them.

Some NorthStars did not graduate high school or obtain a GED; others were at-risk of dropping out. Co-Lab aims to disrupt that mindset and present opportunities for postsecondary education leading to family-sustaining careers.

Co-Lab sessions progress in sequence, starting with an overview of NorthStars' interests and strengths to introduce aligned career options. With career-exploration software, NorthStars research education options and observe them in practice during college site visits. Meet-and-greets with college recruiters, military representatives, and ECMC Group's The College Place continue the conversation and clarify requirement and cost considerations.

**Why this matters:** Many young adults are unaware of postsecondary options or hold misconceptions, even as most family-sustaining careers require further education or training. Building pathways means sparking interest and offering concrete support.

**50%**

Of NorthStars had never received a credential, certificate or diploma

**29.5%**

Of NorthStars stated an interest in postsecondary education options as a reason to join Co-Lab

**14.6%**

Of NorthStars enrolled, applied to or transferred colleges during and following Co-Lab\*

\*Percentage reflects known applications and transfers to universities. The data is self-reported.



# Deeper Look: Trusting Relationships

**Why this matters:** Co-Lab's emphasis on relationships influences both daily interactions and how impact is defined and measured. Trust is built intentionally among partners, NorthStars, and staff, from program design through evaluation. Co-Lab offers a model for using relationships as a strategy to foster resilience, build soft skills, and advance workforce development.

*"A key takeaway for me was the importance of building genuine relationships when connecting with others."*

*- NorthStar*

# Fostering Confidence And Community

Through strong relationships, the Co-Lab model builds confidence and a sense of belonging among NorthStars.

85% of NorthStars listed “a boost in confidence” or “career connections” as the most valuable part of their Co-Lab experience.\* Ongoing longitudinal data will help assess how lasting these gains in confidence and connection prove to be.

**Why this matters:** Confidence and belonging are key drivers of retention in both education and employment settings.

## CONFIDENCE

**3.65 → 4.15**

The average confidence ratings from the exit survey compared to the intake survey trend toward statistical significance.

## BELONGING

**3.58 → 4.15**

The average belonging ratings from the exit survey compared to the intake survey **are statistically significant**.

\*The intake, exit, and 3-month follow-up (for Saint Paul College NorthStars only, due to cohort timing) measured individuals confidence for their future, allowing quantitative longitudinal analysis. At 3-months, confidence dipped slightly. This result is to be expected in the short-term while NorthStars navigate life after the program.

“It’s important to have community and people who want to see you thrive.” – NorthStar

Co-Lab had allowed for me to have more confidence in myself and my future. At first I was scared of change and pivoting in my career, but Co-Lab staff and the guest speakers have taught me that everything will be great! I just must keep going and following through with what I want to do not only for me, but for my community as well. – NorthStar

# Creating Connection In Workforce Development

**Co-Lab encourages partners to build meaningful relationships with NorthStars and intentionally creates an environment that supports this.**

Partners shared that the casual, authentic nature of the sessions made it easier to connect and share their personal journeys.

**Why this matters:** Workforce development programs can sometimes feel transactional: employers present information and hope for future hires. But for young adults who are disconnected, building trust and rapport is often a necessary precursor to meaningful engagement. At Co-Lab, relationships come first, helping young adults feel seen and supported. This relational foundation makes it more likely they'll connect with the content and envision themselves on a career path.

*"The students had really good questions and were engaged as soon as I sat down and asked their names. I had a little moment with each of them giving them a positive response to just their name, so that they understand I see them in a room full of people. A good hey girl hey, or nice to meet you young sir goes a long way."*

*- Session Partner*

*"Since completing the Co-Lab program, I've stayed connected with two of the speakers we met with from Ramsey County. We've talked about internships, career goals, grad school, and the field of social work. Those conversations have been really helpful in giving me guidance and motivation as I plan for my future. I'm grateful for the connections I made through Co-Lab and how they continue to support my growth."*

*- NorthStar*





# Deeper Look: Responsive Structure

**Why this matters:** NorthStars needed an environment that offered both structure and flexibility, creating space for them to show up fully as themselves. Co-Lab's responsive design intentionally leaves parts of the schedule open to reflect each cohort's unique interests and needs. This fosters ownership and trust, with co-creation as a strategy for deep engagement and lasting impact.

*"Co-Lab gave me the opportunity to explore who I want to be"*

*- NorthStar*

# Listening To Trends, An Interest in Entrepreneurship

Co-Lab continuously adapts its offerings in response to the voices of the Young Adult Advisory Council, cohort feedback, and broader shifts in education and workforce development.\*

This led to the inclusion of entrepreneurship in the Co-Lab schedule.

**Why this matters:** Staying aligned with both participant interests and workforce trends is essential to Co-Lab's goal of being built with and for young adults. Entrepreneurship reflects young adults' growing desire for flexibility, independence, and purpose-driven work, making it a relevant addition to the program.

## 44% → 52% → 56%

Interest in entrepreneurship grew steadily from **intake surveys**, to **mid-program assessments** (VitaNavis/YouScience), to the **final exit survey**. More than half of NorthStars expressed a strong interest by the end of the program.

### Entrepreneurship Sessions

- **Entrepreneurship – Where to Begin**  
(Saint Paul College, July 1)
- **Small Business Success**  
(Saint Paul College, July 10)
- **Building a Business**  
(Urban Ventures, Nov 12)

\*National data reflects this trend, especially among Gen Z, with Gen Alpha expected to follow. A desire for autonomy in uncertain job markets fuels this shift (Forbes, 2024).

# Linking Engagement and Relevance



## ENGAGEMENT

**4.3 / 5**

*The average rating on how engaging the NorthStars found the session*

## RELEVANCE

**4.17 / 5**

*The average rating for how relevant the NorthStars found the session*

### Engagement grows when content feels relevant.

After each Co-Lab day, NorthStars completed a Pulse Check Survey on the day's content and experience. Analysis of 1,493 responses shows a significant positive correlation between relevance and engagement.\* This confirms that while engagement and relevance are distinct in the eyes of participants, they are deeply connected. Sessions perceived as relevant are more likely to spark interest and participation.

**Why this matters:** Relevant content perception drives deeper engagement, stronger retention, and greater program stickiness.

\*Statistical analysis: Standard deviation of 1.09 (engagement) and 1.20 (relevance); correlation between the two is statistically significant.

### Noteworthy sessions based on engagement and relevance ratings:

- **Appetite For Change**, cooking & session about lifestyle choices, including violence and addiction
- **612 Jungle yoga lessons**, connecting to a new form of physical health
- **Hands-on healthcare experiences**
- **Fab Life financial literacy game** highlighting real-life budgeting

The sessions share elements of gamification, and presenters shared lived experiences and real-life applications.





## Deeper Look: Whole-Person Focus

**Why this matters:** Programs that overlook whole-person development often miss key barriers to engagement. By addressing well-being and basic needs, Co-Lab creates the conditions for young adults to participate fully and stay focused on their education and career goals. This focus signals care and respect, which young adults recognized and responded to.

*"I didn't really feel like I believed in myself but Co-Lab helped me overcome that mentality."*

*- NorthStar*

# Destigmatizing Mental Health

GROUP MENTAL HEALTH  
SESSIONS  
(BOTH COHORTS)

5

1:1 IN-PERSON MENTAL  
HEALTH SESSIONS  
(URBAN VENTURES COHORT)

40

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID  
CERTIFICATES  
(SAINT PAUL COLLEGE COHORT)

23

**Mental health remains a central need across Co-Lab, yet stigma continues to shape how young adults access support.**

At Saint Paul College, the Young Adult Council recommended 24/7 virtual 1:1 counseling to increase access and privacy. However, NorthStars did not use the service, highlighting how stigma can persist even when support is available. In contrast, group mental health sessions were well received, suggesting that collective, peer-based formats may feel more approachable. Saint Paul NorthStars were also given the opportunity to complete the Mental Health First Aid Certification as part of their skill building. For the Urban Ventures cohort, the Council opted to offer in-person 1:1 counseling with culturally responsive providers, which proved successful.

**Why this matters:** When young adults feel emotionally safe and supported, they are more likely to engage fully and take meaningful steps toward personal and professional growth.

*"A lot of us growing up, weren't as comfortable talking about mental health to others than how it is today, I learned about other people's perspective and how to deal with. Dr. Raj has amazing perspectives in my opinion and he doesn't make people feel uncomfortable."*  
- NorthStar



# Evaluating Co-Lab's Attendance

**Co-Lab understands that the NorthStars face complex barriers and intersecting responsibilities, that can impact their ability to be present.** By providing compensation and a weekly transportation stipend, Co-Lab helps reduce the opportunity cost of showing up and affirms that young adults' time and commitment have value.

NorthStars attended Co-Lab an average of 80% of the time. Each week, two to three participants per cohort were absent, often due to life circumstances such as:

- Transportation challenges
- Court appearances
- Health issues
- Inflexible responsibilities (family, jobs, or school)

**Why this matters:** Since compensation was not directly tied to attendance, these patterns suggest that Co-Lab offered value beyond monetary incentives. The reasons behind absences also underscore the need for deeper wraparound supports, many of which fall outside the program's current scope.

\*Using statistical analysis, the attendance patterns and trends between the older cohort, 18-24 year olds, and the younger cohort, 16-19 year olds, are effectively identical. The numbers to the right reflect the aggregate numbers between the cohorts. Both cohorts exhibit a skew toward longer duration of attendance. Meaning, when NorthStars attend, they stay.

## 80%

Average percentage of individuals that attended weekly

## 6.28

Average weekly hours\*\* attended, excluding absences

## 2.7

Average weekly participant absences per cohort

\*\* Full attendance was 8 hours per week. NorthStar compensation was capped at five hours per week.

# The Journey of a NorthStar: Quiet Confidence

**19-year-old from Minneapolis**

**Experience with the justice system, foster care, and housing instability**

*The NorthStar reluctantly applies for a new program suggested to them by a case manager at the County. After skimming through high school, the NorthStar's experience hardens their worldview. To their surprise, they are accepted into the program. To the surprise of others, they attend.*

*The NorthStar begins cautiously, nervous to show too much interest and be disappointed. Professionals regularly come through the door, eager to share their experiences, career paths, and sometimes, advice. Along the way, the NorthStar continuously shows up and makes progress on their Future Success Plan.*

*The program's end comes about faster than the NorthStar realized. After 12 weeks, quietly, steadily, their confidence grew. Three months after the program, the NorthStar shares a small victory:*

*"I'm applying to the medical manufacturing and microelectronics program and one of the questions is what related skills do I bring to this field. I started panicking and then I realized I can just check my Co-Lab binder. It's crazy how everything is just coming together. When things like this happen I just have a whole new appreciation for the Co-Lab program."*

*-NorthStar*



# The Journey of a NorthStar: Behind-The-Scenes

**22-year-old from Saint Paul**

**Enrolled at local technical college**

**Parent and experience with housing instability**

*The NorthStar notices a flyer in the hall of the technical college they attend: a program to explore different careers and get paid. The NorthStar excitedly applies. Soon, they are attending the first day of Co-Lab.*

*The program starts off well for the NorthStar, the people are friendly, the professionals are interesting, and the NorthStar explores possible careers paths. Then the following week, their babysitter didn't show up and stopped responding; and the next the NorthStar's car broke down. Each event resulted in an absence. The NorthStar felt unsure if they could return to Co-Lab.*

*However, the program manager reached out, invited the NorthStar back and to bring their child. The Co-Lab team supported alternative transportation options and brought in coloring books for the child. The NorthStar completed the program with greater confidence and sense of belonging.*

*"Co-Lab has put me in such a better place mentally and emotionally they have taught me that no matter what, you can be and do whatever you wanna be and do whatever you wanna do as long as the work is being put in."*

*- NorthStar*



# The Journey of a NorthStar: Becoming A Leader

17-year-old from Minneapolis, high school student

Experience with foster care

*The NorthStar hears from a friend about an opportunity to get earn money and applies. Both attend the first day, unsure of what to expect and sit toward the back of the room.*

*Although consistently attending, the NorthStar kept to themselves. In week three of the program, the NorthStar is nominated for a position on the NorthStar peer representatives council. In week six, the group visit a local community college. They work through the activity with ease, excitement for the work growing.*

*After gaining some confidence, the NorthStar shares concerns about high school graduation with the program manager. The program manager connected with the school, which supported Co-Lab's recruitment efforts. By the end of the program, the NorthStar got back on track for high school graduation.*

*"Today I realized I could be a leader and role model for the younger generation"*

*- NorthStar*



# Looking Ahead

# Scaling with Fidelity

As Co-Lab shifts from pilot to long-term implementation, several ideas to explore stand out as key to sustaining impact. These emerging strategies reflect where the model is gaining traction, what partners need, and how young adults are shaping its future.

## Measuring Long-Term Impact

Measuring long-term impact becomes even more critical as Co-Lab integrates into a larger regional ecosystem. Following multiple cohorts across partner sites will provide a fuller picture of how trusting relationships, responsive structure, and whole-person support influence young adults' trajectories over years, not just weeks.

**This longitudinal insight will help align partners around shared goals, strengthen referrals and pathways, and inform where the ecosystem must shift to better support emerging talent.**



# Emerging Strategies: Alumni Network

**Continuing Engagement and Support:** The Co-Lab Beta 2025 pilots built a community of young adults working on their future and supporting each other. A coordinated Alumni Network can support the sustainability of the Co-Lab model, and in turn, young adult success.

Co-Lab shows promising results in helping young adults re-engage with education and career pathways. In exit surveys, many NorthStars named community and relationships as a highlight. Three months later, over half of the Saint Paul College NorthStars responded to the follow-up survey, suggesting loyalty to the program.

**NorthStars have indicated a continued interest in support through community, referrals, and learning opportunities.**

- 1 Do Now:** Continue engagement with Co-Lab alumni through data collection and invitations to other cohort celebrations.
- 2 Do Next:** Establish the next rendition of the Young Adult Advisory Council and invite Co-Lab 2025 alumni to participate
- 3 Do Later:** Create deeper alumni engagement opportunities led by alumni themselves, offering small grants or stipends for them to design events, host convenings, or build networks that reflect their interests and provide pathways to give back.

# Emerging Strategies: Industry Specificity

**Deepening Understanding and Industry Ties:** The Co-Lab Beta 2025 pilots focused on career exploration and hands-on experiences, with attention to Minnesota's Drive for 5 industries. Although the Co-Lab model emphasizes career exploration, there are opportunities for more industry-specific learning.

Most NorthStars entered Co-Lab without a clear career path. As the weeks went on, they requested additional sessions on specific sectors and careers. At the same time, industry partners shared a desire to provide more exposure and skills-based training.

**While career exploration remains central to the model, there is room to develop more direct talent pipelines with industry partners.**

- 1 Do Now:** Introduce the idea of “mini Co-Labs” or 4-week, alumni-only, industry-specific sprints, and workshop the concept with the Young Adult Advisory Council.
- 2 Do Next:** Identify and develop post-Co-Lab sessions with key industry partners, aligned to high-interest sectors.
- 3 Do Later:** Pilot these industry-focused alumni experiences and develop metrics to evaluate participation, skill-building, and career alignment.

# Emerging Strategies: Community of Practice

**Facilitating Collaboration Across the Ecosystem:** The Co-Lab Beta 2025 pilots introduced many partners to new ways the education and workforce ecosystem can better meet young adults from under-resourced communities. These interactions sparked momentum for deeper collaboration and the potential for broader systems change.

Co-Lab revealed a strong appetite among partners for shared learning and a more coordinated approach. By cultivating a community of practice, Co-Lab can help partners move beyond one-time engagements toward an ecosystem mindset. In this model, organizations work together to align efforts and adapt based on young adult feedback.

**Together, partners are better equipped to build understanding across generations, improve access to meaningful career opportunities, and address systemic barriers that limit young adults' success.**

- 1** **Do Now:** Maintain regular engagement with Co-Lab partners between cohorts through data sharing and program updates.
- 2** **Do Next:** Reconvene the Partner Advisory Council to identify shared priorities and ecosystem needs.
- 3** **Do Later:** Build a community of practice with partners across sites to support coordinated, youth-centered ecosystem transformation.

# Next Steps For Co-Lab's Future

## How To Start On Monday

ECMC Group renewed funding for a new Co-Lab partner, Saint Paul Promise / Wilder Foundation, to continue as the backbone organization for Co-Lab.



**Onboard Staff:** Hire core team and schedule training on the Co-Lab Implementation Plan and materials.



**Establish Operations:** Set up internal workflows, align roles, and confirm back-office supports (e.g., finance, communications).



**Activate Advisory Councils:** Launch outreach and scheduling for the Young Adult Advisory Council (design sessions) and Partner Advisory Council (2026 kickoff).



**Confirm Cohort Logistics:** Finalize cohort dates, session times, and site location.



**Advance Partner Engagement:** Reconnect with existing partners and initiate alignment conversations with new and existing education, workforce, and community organizations.



**Align Communications:** Finalize the communications plan and internal coordination strategy to support partner outreach and program visibility.



# Changing The Narrative For Workforce Development

**Co-Lab shifts the narrative about young adults from under-resourced communities who are disconnected from school and work. Rather than viewing them as workers to be trained, Co-Lab positions them as leaders with insight and potential. The model focuses on building confidence, belonging, and resilience as foundations for long-term success.**

Co-Lab connects individual growth with broader systems change. It helps young adults re-engage with education and take concrete steps toward careers. These outcomes contribute to stronger talent pipelines and more access to opportunities.

Young adults co-create Co-Lab, shaping both content and delivery to reflect their needs, like relevant learning, relationship-building, and flexibility. Ecosystem partners benefit from a shared resource hub and referral pathways, while also expanding their talent pipeline and strengthening cross-sector alignment. With early impact data and a clear gap in the ecosystem, ECMC Group renewed its investment to expand the model.

**Co-Lab creates impact:**

From one-time engagements

to deep relationship building

From narrow workforce pipelines

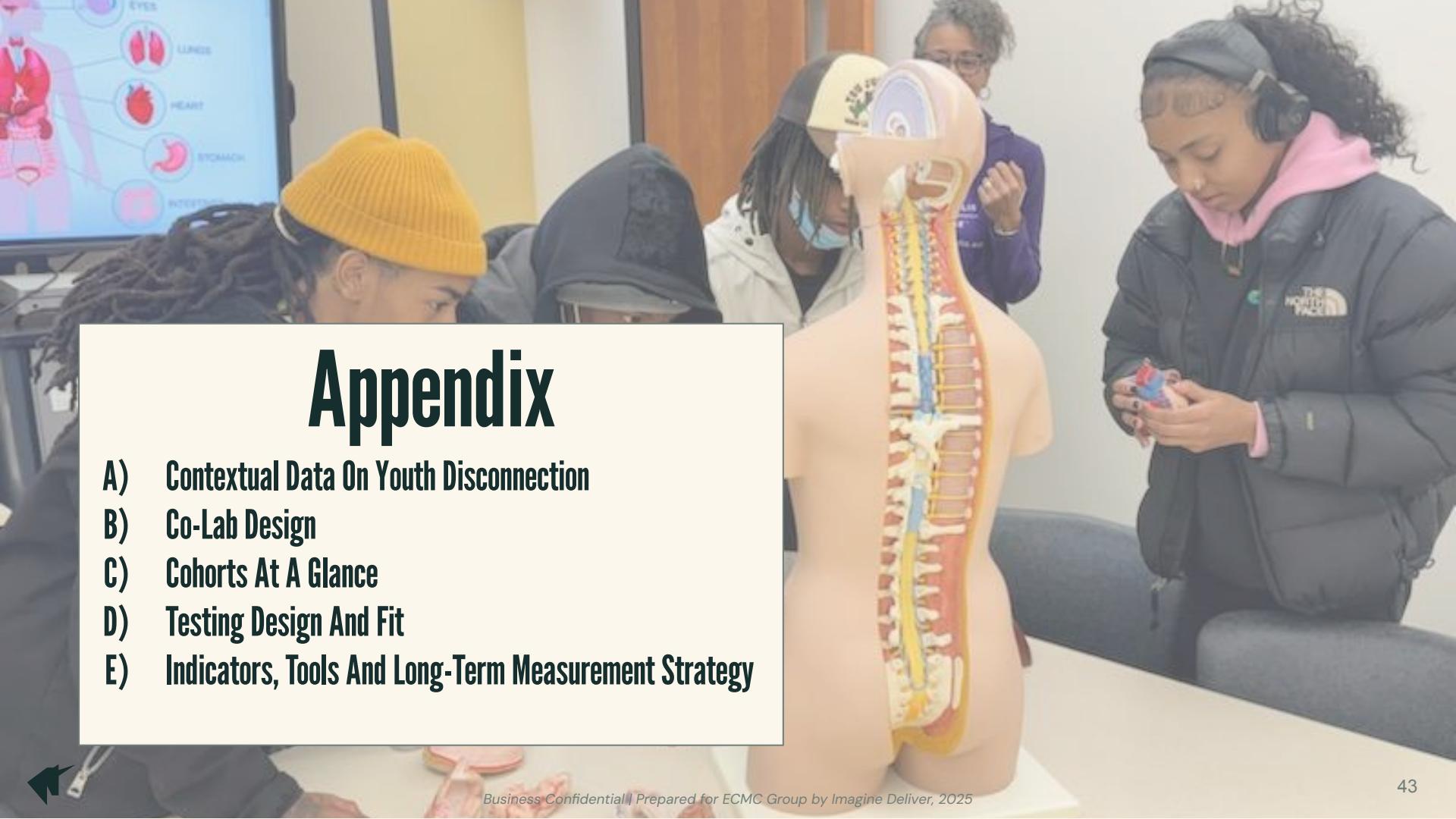
to holistic pathways

From isolated interventions

to coordinated ecosystem initiatives

# Appendix

- A) Contextual Data On Youth Disconnection**
- B) Co-Lab Design**
- C) Cohorts At A Glance**
- D) Testing Design And Fit**
- E) Indicators, Tools And Long-Term Measurement Strategy**



# A) Contextual Data On Youth Disconnection

**Co-Lab aims to re-engage young people who are disconnected from education and employment. This section provides context on the societal and economic costs of this disconnection.**



# Understanding the Cost of Young Adult Disconnection

Minnesota's young people are participating in the workforce at record rates, yet many are underemployed, disconnected, or stuck in low-growth jobs.

# 71%

Of Minnesotans ages 16–24 are in the labor force

This is a historic high in youth participation. Teen unemployment has dropped to 5–6%, the lowest since tracking began.

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 2023 data

# 27,800

Young people ages 16 to 24 in the Twin Cities (8.4%) disconnected from school and work in 2022

These young adults are not accessing education, employment, or training, leaving long-term talent and potential untapped.

Measure of America, Youth Disconnection in America Report, 2024

# 85,300

Minnesotans working part-time involuntarily, data from March 2025

That is an increase of 30,800 people in one year who are working part-time but want to work full time. Young adults are often employed in roles that don't offer sufficient hours or stability.

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 2025

# \$350 M

Annual cost to Minnesota taxpayers from disconnected youth

According to national estimates, each disconnected youth costs taxpayers approximately \$14,000 annually, accounting for lost tax revenue and increased public expenditures.

Measure of America, Youth Disconnection in America Report, 2024

# High Turnover Undermines Workforce Stability

Many young adults are cycling through unstable jobs without building momentum. High turnover rates and short job tenure leave young workers disconnected from long-term opportunity and employers struggling to retain talent.

# 20%

**Quarterly turnover rate for young adults, ages 16 to 24, in Minnesota**

Based on recent state data, roughly 1 in 5 young workers leave their jobs each quarter.

*Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), 2022 data*

# \$4,700

**The average cost of recruiting talent in 2022**

Recruiting even entry-level talent comes with significant cost, making retention a smart workforce investment.

*Society of Human Resource Management, 2022*

# \$17,500

**The replacement cost for a recent college hire in Minnesota earning a median salary of \$43,867**

Replacing early-career talent can cost over 40% of their salary, highlighting the value of keeping young workers engaged and growing.

*Gallup Workplace, 2024; Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2024*

# 85%

**Of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been created yet**

This underscores the importance of equipping young adults with adaptable skills and career readiness to navigate an evolving job market.

*RealTime Talent, SPPS Career Clusters Report 2025*



## B) Co-Lab Design

**The Co-Lab model was built to support engagement, learning, and co-creation with young adults. This section describes the core components, principles, and intended user experience of the model.**



# Mission, Vision, And Values



## VISION

Our vision is to engage the full workforce ecosystem to align educational pathways and career development in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metro area for young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 to thrive.

## MISSION

Connect young adults to a collaborative ecosystem that supports their mental and physical health, financial wellness, educational aspirations, and career growth all in one space, co-created by and for young adults. By bridging education and workforce opportunities, we empower young adults to confidently step into meaningful careers and contribute to a thriving economy.

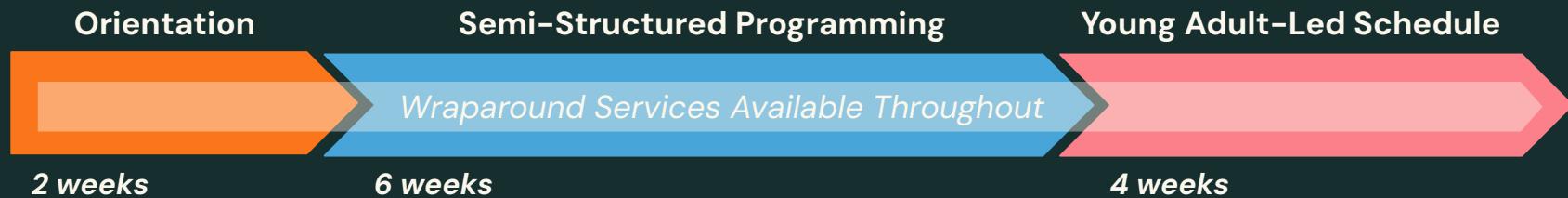
## VALUES

- **Quality Over Quantity**
- **Prioritize Young Adult Agency**
- **Meet Young people Where They Are**
- **Elevate Perspectives From Our Emerging Workforce**
- **Listen And Adapt, Early And Often**



# Twelve Weeks Co-Created By Young Adults

## 12-Week Structure Cohorts



## Young Adult Co-Creation

### 1 Young Adult Council (11 members)

*Four Design Sessions Before and During Co-Lab*

### 2 Co-Lab Representatives (5 members)

*Two Design Sessions During Co-Lab*

## Partner Advisory Support

### 1 Partner Advisory Council (12 members)

*Two Sessions Before and During Co-Lab*



# What Co-Lab Delivers Over 12 Weeks

- **Cohort-Based Learning**  
Weekly, in-person half-day sessions built for connection, in a space designed by young adults.
- **Workforce-Aligned Experiences**  
Sessions and hands-on experiences introducing high-growth industries tied to Minnesota's Drive for 5, plus creative, entrepreneurial, and emerging sectors.
- **Wraparound Supports**  
Mental health care, career navigation, wellness resources, food, transportation support, and hourly and milestone-based financial support to reduce barriers and promote stability.
- **Flex Learning & Community**  
Sessions focused on personal growth, including financial literacy, nutrition, wellness, and digital skills.
- **Young Adult-Led Programming**  
In the final 4 weeks, participants lead sessions based on their interests, building toward a personalized future plan.
- **Built-In Feedback Loops**  
Real-time input, co-design sessions, and youth leadership keep the program responsive and relevant.

## C) Cohorts At A Glance

A high-level summary of the two Co-Lab Beta 2025 cohorts, including participant demographics, engagement levels, and program elements, offering a snapshot of who participated and how the cohorts operated.



# 2025 Cohorts At A Glance

**AGES:**

18 to 24 year-olds

**DATES:**

May 27th to August 14th, 2025

**SESSIONS:**Tuesday & Thursday,  
2:00 – 6:00 pm**COMPENSATION:**

\$25 per hour, max 5 hours per week  
 \$1,850 for full program  
 \$10 transportation stipend, weekly  
 \$25 gift card raffle for survey completion

**MENTAL HEALTH:**

Completely virtual, appointments available through Calmerry

**PHYSICAL HEALTH:**

Opportunity for a membership with the YMCA in East St Paul

**EXPERIENCES:**

- Five hands-on experiences outside the classroom
- Team Behind the Team Tour & Panel with the Minnesota Twins at Twins Field
- Mental Health First Aid Certification

**Saint Paul College Cohort****Urban Ventures Cohort**

16 to 19 year-olds

September 15th to December 3rd, 2025

Monday & Wednesday,  
3:30 – 7:30 pm

\$20 per hour, max 5 hours per week  
 \$1,550 for full program  
 \$10 transportation stipend, weekly  
 Additional bonus payments of \$10 for certificate completion

In-person, weekly opportunity with Roots Wellness

Opportunity for a Planet Fitness membership at a location convenient to each individual

- Five hands-on experiences, including field trips
- Session with four legislators and the Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner
- Air Permitting & Pollution Workshop
- Trades experiences with VR headsets

# Engaging Young Adults From Under-Resourced Communities

Co-Lab recruitment efforts targeted young adults from under-resourced communities. Out of 170 interested young adults, 48 became Co-Lab Beta NorthStars\*. Participants were randomly chosen from the applicant pool, provided they met the basic criteria: ages 16–24, residents of the Greater Twin Cities area, and living in the U.S. for at least five years.

**\*NorthStar:** participant in the Co-Lab program, name suggested and voted on by peers in the Young Adult Advisory Council.

**48**

NorthStars from the Twin Cities participated in Co-Lab Beta, 24 in each cohort

**19%**

Of NorthStars held caregiving responsibilities

**48%**

Of NorthStars were or have experienced housing instability

**10.4%**

Of NorthStars have been involved with the justice system

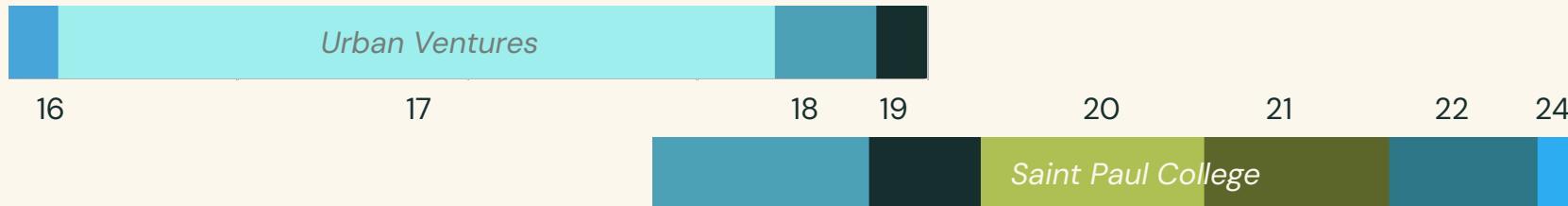
**21%**

Of NorthStars were neither in school nor working

**8.3%**

Of NorthStars have or are working on their GED

**AGES**



# Leveraging A Strong Network Of Support

**62**

Partners  
supporting Co-Lab  
Beta 2025

**131**

Volunteer hours from  
professionals

**100%**

Partners willing to  
return to Co-Lab

**4.39 / 5**

Average rating of the  
energy in the room by  
partners

COMMUNITY & LEARNING	EDUCATION & WORKFORCE
             	                           

## D) Testing Design And Fit

**The two Co-Lab Beta 2025 cohorts tested variables such as age, compensation, location, structure, and support formats to inform future best practices, standards, and program structure.**



# Who Thrives In Co-Lab



INSIGHT	EXPERIENCE	DIFFERENTIATORS
AGE DIVERSITY	Room standards and expectations were often upheld by the eldest participants, creating natural opportunities for leadership and maturity. The Young Adult Council recommended welcoming older participants into each cohort to support this dynamic.	 
VARIOUS LIVED EXPERIENCES	Shared and distinct lived experiences within the cohorts built empathy and fostered community. By honoring each person's unique background, trust and growth happened quickly. Young Adults wanted to connect with each other.	 
SESSION PACING	The first cohort at Saint Paul College reinforced Co-Lab's value of quality over quantity. It revealed the need for more intentional breaks and community time to foster trust and self-exploration. These lessons shaped the Urban Ventures schedule, creating more space for connection, decompression, and belonging.	  
COLLABORATION FIRST	Co-Lab staff addressed challenges with the young adults, rather than for them. From setting shared expectations for bringing a child to Co-Lab to group working norms, young adults had the solutions to the challenges experienced.	  



# Designing Spaces That Feel Safe And Welcoming



INSIGHT	EXPERIENCE	DIFFERENTIATORS
<b>MOVEMENT MATTERS</b>	At both sites, Co-Lab programming used at least two rooms for group sessions. Multiple spaces allowed for regular movement and a change of scenery, which NorthStars consistently noted helped sustain their attention and energy.	
<b>WARM &amp; WELCOMING</b>	The Young Adult Advisory Council recommended that Co-Lab spaces include plants, colorful artwork, lounge seating, and soft lighting to help their peers feel at ease. Overall, they emphasized creating a warm, welcoming, and calming environment where young adults could learn comfortably.	
<b>SITE PARTNER COLLABORATION</b>	Regular touch points with the site partner helped smooth operational needs while building a strong relationship for future requests. This relationship building with site partners creates additional buy-in. During the Beta pilots, Co-Lab staff met with Urban Ventures bi-weekly.	
<b>SHARED EXPECTATIONS</b>	At Urban Ventures, NorthStars helped set expectations for themselves, creating Shared Agreements and naming consequences. This shift was informed by learnings from the Saint Paul College cohort and the need for more structure with a younger group. Expectations were also shared with session partners to support consistency across the Co-Lab space.	



# Sessions That Keep Young Adults Coming Back



INSIGHT	EXPERIENCE	DIFFERENTIATORS
<b>LEARNING BY DOING</b>	The Young Adult Council and NorthStars constantly reminded Co-Lab staff that they learn best by doing. They asked for hands-on activities, field trips, and creative expression. These activities were prioritized.	
<b>LOW-PRESSURE ENGAGEMENT</b>	After the first professional panel, NorthStars shared that lower-pressure formats made it easier to engage. As the format shifted from panel to long-table discussion to World Café-style roundtables, participation increased as the pressure to perform decreased.	
<b>SESSION TYPE BLEND</b>	The Co-Lab model is designed to support the whole person. Sessions were intentionally paired to keep this in mind, for example, combining an industry-led session with a wellbeing activity. One pairing featured a yoga session followed by the instructor sharing their experience as a small business owner.	
<b>PROFESSIONALS LIKE US</b>	The Young Adult Council emphasized the importance of connecting with relatable professionals. From the start, Co-Lab prioritized partners who reflected the identities and lived experiences of the NorthStars. Ongoing relationships with these professionals are a powerful signal of the program's lasting impact.	



# Deeper Look: Impact of Age Cohort Dynamics in Program Experience

**Key Takeaway:** As a workforce readiness and postsecondary pathway initiative, Co-Lab is uniquely positioned to engage and connect disengaged young adults ages 18 to 24.

Co-Lab's beta pilots tested the model across different sites, age ranges, and schedules. While completion rates were similar across cohorts, staff and partners observed meaningful differences in program experience. The impact of age in cohort dynamics contributed to this difference.

At Saint Paul College, where the cohort skewed older (18 to 24-year olds), NorthStars provided deeper, more detailed feedback, which led to more responsive program adjustments. Survey data analysis showed statistically significant increases in both the breadth and depth of open-ended responses compared to Urban Ventures (16 to 19-year olds).

Each site offered a supportive environment, but age shaped how NorthStars engaged with it. At Urban Ventures, a youth-centered space promoted more comfort and connection. At Saint Paul College, older participants grasped Co-Lab's purpose more clearly.

Currently, most career exploration initiatives in the Twin Cities focus on younger teens or high schoolers. Outside of formal postsecondary education, there are few organized, and paid, opportunities for individuals in their early 20s for career exploration and exposure, and none with the flexibility to bring children.

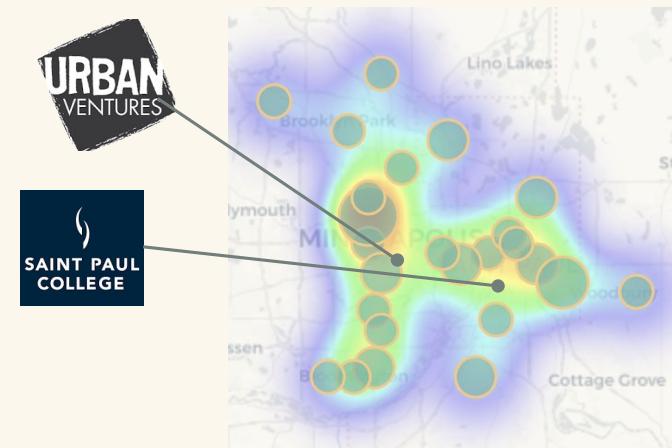
# Deeper Look: Why Location Drives Access And Participation

**Key Takeaway:** As demand grows, strategic site selection will be critical. Prioritizing program locations near young adults and considering proximity-based enrollment can reduce participation barriers and support program sustainability.

Co-Lab Beta intentionally partnered with organizations located near its target audience: Urban Ventures in Minneapolis and Saint Paul College in Saint Paul.

Both cohorts received applications from across the metro area, with most participants living in North Minneapolis and East Saint Paul. Still, interest extended beyond those neighborhoods, with applicants from Brooklyn Center, Prior Lake, and Woodbury. The map below shows NorthStars' locations in relation to the Co-Lab sites. This broad reach signals strong interest in workforce programming that also focuses on young adults' experiences and well-being.

Co-Lab offers a paid, low-barrier entry point that still asks for commitment and sustained participation. Its structure makes it more accessible to young adults from under-resourced communities.



# Deeper Look: Compensating Young Adults

**Key Takeaway:** Future cohorts should maintain the milestone payments, confirm transportation needs ahead of NorthStars before the program starts, and implement hourly pay of \$20 for the full 8 hours. This aligns with motivating factors and barriers for the NorthStars.

Co-Lab Beta paid young adults directly through deliverable-based, hourly, and stipend compensation. Throughout the Beta cohorts, the different payment methods were tested for efficacy. Hourly compensation held three intentions: to incentivize attendance, to compensate time, and to address barriers.

Milestone payments did show positive correlation with completion of tasks. 96% of NorthStars earned \$350 through milestone payments for completion of the Orientation Checklist and Future Success Plan, \$100 and \$250 respectively.

Transportation stipends of \$10 per week helped reduce cost barriers, though transportation still posed challenges.

Direct Payment Totals to Young Adults (n=48)	Saint Paul College	Urban Ventures
<b>Milestone Payments</b>	\$8,050	\$8,000
<b>Hourly Compensation</b>	\$29,894	\$24,560
<b>Ad-hoc Payments</b>	\$600	\$450
<b>Transportation</b>	\$2,695	\$2,640
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$41,239</b>	<b>\$35,650</b>

Saint Paul College and Urban Ventures NorthStars were paid at different hourly rates, \$25 and \$20 respectively, capped at 5 out of 8 hours per week. See Appendix C for a breakdown of other variables.

Additional payments (ad-hoc) incentivized outside work, including for pre-work on the Mental Health First Aid certificate and completion of digital literacy certificates.



# Deeper Look: Aligning Interests With High Growth Industries

**Key Takeaway:** Input from the Young Adult Advisory Council and Minnesota's Drive for 5 revealed overlapping priorities. Co-Lab is well-positioned to meet both young adults' interests and workforce demand.

The Young Adult Advisory Council and a focus on Minnesota's Drive for 5 industries shaped the sessions for weeks 1 through 8. The final four weeks were tailored to each cohort's specific interests.

This structure served two purposes:

1. It upheld Co-Lab's commitment to co-creation and responsiveness, fostering ownership among participants.
2. It reduced the administrative burden of scheduling by front-loading the design with insights from young adults and workforce priorities.

Young Adult Advisory Council	Minnesota Drive For Five	
Early Inputs From Young Adults In Comparison To Minnesota Drive For 5 Industries:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Computer Science &amp; Tech</li> <li>2. Coaching &amp; Mentorship</li> <li>3. Architecture &amp; Urban Planning</li> <li>4. Creative Arts (Writing, Film, Design)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Construction</li> <li>2. Education</li> <li>3. Healthcare</li> <li>4. IT</li> <li>5. Manufacturing</li> </ol>
Co-Lab Beta 2025 Cohort Top Interests:	Saint Paul College Cohort	Urban Ventures Cohort
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Business &amp; Entrepreneurship</li> <li>2. Education</li> <li>3. Healthcare</li> <li>4. Construction &amp; Trades</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Healthcare</li> <li>2. Business &amp; Entrepreneurship</li> <li>3. Construction &amp; Trades</li> <li>4. Creative Art</li> </ol>



# Deeper Look: From Exploration To Pathways That Feel Possible

**Key Takeaway:** By pairing personal insight with real-world exposure, Co-Lab helps young adults see their future more clearly and believe it's within reach.

**Co-Lab helps young adults connect their strengths to real, achievable career and education pathways.**

Every NorthStar (48 total) completed guided self-exploration using the VitaNavis (Saint Paul College) or YouScience (Urban Ventures) college and career readiness platforms. These tools helped them identify their aptitudes and interests, and match them to high-growth careers.

Career exploration wasn't limited to the worksheets in each NorthStar's Future Success Plan. They engaged in hands-on activities at Saint Paul College and Minneapolis College, and had access to virtual reality industry simulations, and World Café-style career panels. This blend of exploration and applied exposure made options feel relevant and real.

The Co-Lab model remained responsive to cohort interests, keeping engagement high. Individual coaching with HIRED and Project for Pride in Living helped NorthStars take next steps.

## Field Trips



## Practical Credentials

**60+**

IT Certificates (45) and Mental Health First Aid Certificates (23)

# Deeper Look: Visioning Their Future

**Key Takeaway:** At the start of Co-Lab, NorthStars created vision boards to express their aspirations. By week 12, they paired them with goal roadmaps, showing how early visions translated into concrete next steps. The visual outputs reflected life stage differences and helped Co-Lab better understand each cohort's evolving goals.

During week one of Co-Lab, Northstars created vision boards to surface their hopes, values, interests, and early confidence levels. This visual expression revealed their emotional and motivational starting points.

For analysis, we used a structured coding process that captured visual themes, written messages, and layout patterns. These codes were synthesized through thematic and sentiment analysis.

The older cohort had broader breadth of images included in the vision boards, 3.25 elements, compared to 2.2 elements from the 16-19 year olds.

Most NorthStars expressed themselves through images rather than words. Most boards included values & emotions imagery (68%) and/or text (84%).\*

While 50% of NorthStars included career-related text on their vision boards, the majority did not include any career-related imagery.



\*Materials provided included magazines, construction paper, markers, stickers, and word print outs.

# Deeper Look: Actionable Roadmaps

**Key Takeaway:** Co-Lab gave young adults the structure, resources, and time to work on themselves. Through the Future Success Plan and partner engagement, NorthStars connected daily choices to longer-term goals, and built a roadmap with clear and specific objectives.

**Co-Lab gave young adults something many had never been offered before: the time and support to work on themselves.**

Throughout the 12 weeks, NorthStars worked on their personal Future Success Plans. The Plan included worksheets on budgeting, identifying support networks, reflecting on personal wellness, and mapping clear, actionable steps for education, career, and life over the next 3 to 6 months.

Each section of the plan was reinforced by hands-on sessions and trusted partners, including for content beyond education and career. This included Blaze Credit Union for budgeting workshops and Tubman for building healthy relationships, among many others.

All partners were encouraged to be relational first, sharing their stories and lived experiences, rather than leading with credentials. NorthStars were encouraged to continue building those relationships beyond the program.



# Deeper Look: Building Mutual Commitment

**Key Takeaway:** Co-Lab's core values run as a throughline from early design through delivery. NorthStars and partners engage with Co-Lab's values through shared expectations, active participation, and relationship-building rooted in mutual respect.

From the beginning, Co-Lab centers its values not only in design but in daily practice.

- *Quality Over Quantity*
- *Prioritize Young Adult Agency*
- *Meet Young Adults Where They Are*
- *Elevate Perspectives From Our Emerging Workforce*
- *Listen And Adapt, Early and Often*



NorthStars co-created shared agreements and engaged in honest conversations about accountability, unacceptable behaviors, and balancing flexibility with responsibility. They were encouraged to treat Co-Lab like a professional commitment. Partners learned about the values in action during Orientation Sessions.

All young adults and partners signed the Co-Lab Values Banner, a visible symbol of mutual trust and commitment, prominently displayed throughout the program.

# E) Indicators, Tools, And Long-Term Measurement Strategy

**Summary of expected key outcomes the Co-Lab model seeks to measure and the tools used to gather data, establishing a shared framework for understanding impact.**



# Measuring Individual-Level Progress and Change

Co-Lab tracks individual-level indicators to understand how young adults experience the program, what outcomes are achieved, and how Co-Lab supports their personal, educational, and career growth.

LEARNING FOCUS	INDICATOR	MEASUREMENT FORMAT BEFORE & DURING CO-LAB
FORMAT & DURATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retention and completion rates</li> <li>Session attendance</li> <li>Participant feedback on 12-week structure</li> <li>Completion of personalized success plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of enrolled participants</li> <li>Number / Frequency</li> <li>Self-reported (survey or qualitative input)</li> <li>Number / Completion rate</li> </ul>
WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilization of wraparound supports</li> <li>Satisfaction with wraparound supports</li> <li>Continued engagement after program completion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of instances / Frequency</li> <li>Self-reported (survey scale)</li> <li>Number of follow-up interactions / Duration</li> </ul>
FINANCIAL INCENTIVE IMPACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivation to participate</li> <li>Engagement beyond compensation</li> <li>Completion of milestone checklist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-reported (survey / reflections)</li> <li>Self-reported (survey + participation after incentives)</li> <li>Number / Percentage</li> </ul>
PROGRAMMING RELEVANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarity on personal/career goals</li> <li>Career interest shifts</li> <li>Alignment with regional workforce needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-reported (survey scale), career navigation tool</li> <li>Self-reported (pre/post survey or reflection), career navigation tool</li> <li>Assessed through reported interest, career navigation tool and partner survey</li> </ul>

# Measuring Individual-Level Progress (Continued)

LEARNING FOCUS	INDICATOR	MEASUREMENT FORMAT BEFORE & DURING CO-LAB
PARTICIPANT AGENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of belonging and peer connection</li> <li>• Strength of adult relationships</li> <li>• Confidence in decision-making</li> <li>• Participant reflections on experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reported (validated scale or reflection)</li> <li>• Self-reported (survey / feedback)</li> <li>• Self-reported (survey or reflection)</li> <li>• Qualitative (journals, quotes, debriefs)</li> </ul>
LEADERSHIP & CO-CREATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant input in design</li> <li>• Use of feedback loops</li> <li>• Changes made as a result</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tracked participation in feedback activities</li> <li>• Number of adaptations made based on youth feedback</li> <li>• Qualitative / Number of program modifications</li> </ul>
EDUCATION & CAREER PATHWAYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrollment in education or training programs</li> <li>• Entry into education, training, or employment pathways</li> <li>• Continued engagement with career navigation services</li> <li>• Attainment of credentials or certifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reported or verified enrollment (Yes/No)</li> <li>• Number / Percentage</li> <li>• Number of follow-up touchpoints</li> <li>• Number / Completion status</li> </ul>
INCOME & ECONOMIC OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseline income</li> <li>• Change in income or earnings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-reported income at intake</li> <li>• Self-reported or verified growth at follow-ups</li> </ul>

# Tracking Progress Toward Systems-Level Impact

Co-Lab measures system-level indicators to assess how it engages partners, aligns with workforce and education ecosystems, and how it can inform scalable, sustainable change across the broader landscape.

LEARNING FOCUS	INDICATOR	MEASUREMENT FORMAT DURING CO-LAB
PARTNER ENGAGEMENT & CONTRIBUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of partner touchpoints (visits, panels, events)</li> <li>Referrals made into education, training, or employment</li> <li>Partner feedback on Co-Lab experience</li> <li>Breadth of sector representation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number</li> <li>Number</li> <li>Self-reported (survey/interview)</li> <li>Count by sector</li> </ul>
RESPONSIVENESS & ALIGNMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-Lab responsiveness to youth feedback</li> <li>Partner responsiveness to Co-Lab feedback, including from youth</li> <li>Co-Lab alignment with workforce trends or regional plans</li> <li>Coordination across partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number and type of adaptations documented</li> <li>Number and type of adaptations documented</li> <li>Qualitative review / Documented matches</li> <li>Qualitative; existence of joint processes or shared information</li> </ul>
SCALABILITY & INFLUENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest in funding, sustaining, or expanding Co-Lab</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expressions of interest / Follow-up actions</li> </ul>

# Building Throughlines Toward Long-Term Impact

Co-Lab has embedded throughlines or key data points to connect early outcomes to longer-term benchmarks. In addition to young adult and partner-reported data, future benchmark data sources should include additional government agencies, research institutions, and private and social sector entities.

LEARNING FOCUS	LONG-TERM BENCHMARK	THROUGHLINES IN CO-LAB DATA COLLECTION
EDUCATION & TRAINING	Postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion	Future plans, follow-up surveys, referral tracking
EMPLOYMENT & EARNINGS	Income growth, job retention and alignment with high-growth industries	Career interest data, employer referrals, follow-up surveys
WELLBEING & STABILITY	Continued access to mental health support and housing stability	Wraparound support utilization, wellbeing reflections, follow-up surveys
PARTICIPANT AGENCY & LEADERSHIP	Sustained goal setting, leadership roles or civic/peer engagement	Young adult-led programming, personal future success plans, alumni engagement in Co-Lab co-creation
SYSTEM EFFICIENCY & VALUE	Reduced youth disconnection rates (NEET), increased partner collaboration, recruitment cost savings, participant job retention	Partner referrals, partner engagement surveys, program cost vs. outcome data

# Tracking Change Over Time: Individual Level

Co-Lab uses follow-up assessments at 3, 6, and 12 months to measure change. To date, Co-Lab has surveyed Co-Lab Alpha 2024 participants at the 12-month mark, and Co-Lab Beta 2025 Saint Paul College participants at 3 months. These time-based touchpoints help assess sustained impact and guide program refinement and scalability.

INDICATOR	3 MONTHS AND 6 MONTHS	12 MONTHS
POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT	Enrollment confirmed, persistence	Credential progress or completion
EMPLOYMENT	Job status (Y/N), job fit and duration	Wage growth, advancement
CAREER NAVIGATION ENGAGEMENT	Initial follow-up	Self-directed or mentorship involvement
MOTIVATION BEYOND INCENTIVES	Goal reflections, ongoing self-motivation	Purpose-driven engagement
CONFIDENCE & DIRECTION	Self-assessed clarity/confidence	Comparison to baseline
WRAPAROUND SUPPORT USAGE	Re-engagement, continued use	Reconnection or independence
INCOME	Baseline collected, income change	Growth or stabilization

# Tracking Change Over Time: Systems Level

Co-Lab tracks partner indicators at 3, 6, and 12 months to assess how the program strengthens workforce coordination and to inform future program design for long-term sustainability and impact. To date, Co-Lab has surveyed partners from the Co-Lab Beta 2025 cohort at Saint Paul College.

INDICATOR	3 MONTHS AND 6 MONTHS	12 MONTHS
PARTNER FEEDBACK	Initial survey or debrief, follow-up experience reflections	Full survey or interview
ENGAGEMENT & REFERRALS	Activities tracked, continued participation / referrals	Sustained or expanded involvement
RESPONSIVENESS TO YOUTH FEEDBACK	Documented adaptations (if any), follow-up adjustments	New processes or policy shifts
COORDINATION ACROSS SYSTEMS	Noted efforts, aligned practices	Deeper integration
SCALING INTEREST	Informal expressions, early conversations	Funding commitments, Co-Lab site replication
COST & EFFICIENCY	Partner perception of Co-Lab cost-benefit	Cost savings, ROI, or leveraged investment

# Data Collection Tools

The full suite of Co-Lab data collection tools can be found in [SharePoint](#):

- TOOL 1: PARTICIPANT REGISTRATION FORM
- TOOL 2: PARTICIPANT INTAKE FORM
- TOOL 3: PARTICIPANT PULSE SURVEY
- TOOL 4: PARTNER FEEDBACK PULSE SURVEY
- TOOL 5: VISIONING
- TOOL 6: CREATIVE DATA STATIONS & REFLECTION ACTIVITIES
- TOOL 7: YOUNG ADULT-LED CO-LAB REPRESENTATIVES FEEDBACK MOMENTS
- TOOL 8: ATTENDANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE TRACKING
- TOOL 9: PARTICIPANT EXIT SURVEY
- TOOL 10: PARTICIPANT 3-MONTH AND 6-MONTH FOLLOW-UP SURVEY
- TOOL 11: PARTNER 3-MONTH AND 6-MONTH FOLLOW-UP SURVEY
- TOOL 12: PARTICIPANT 12-MONTH FOLLOW-UP SURVEY
- TOOL 13: PARTNER 12-MONTH FOLLOW-UP SURVEY



# Data Limitations: What to Keep in Mind

**The findings in this report should be interpreted with consideration of methodological limitations:**

- The small sample limits the generalizability of findings and increases the impact of individual variation on overall trends. Across two Co-Lab Beta 2025 cohorts, the total number of NorthStars was  $n=48$ .
- Partner data, representing individuals who engaged with Co-Lab through paid services or volunteer facilitation, also reflects a limited sample. While  $n=62$  partners were involved, survey response rates were lower, which further narrows the representativeness of findings.
- This evaluation is based on short-term data collected before, during, and immediately after program participation. While these data offer valuable insight into participant experience and early signs of change, long-term impact data are not yet available, limiting the ability to assess sustained outcomes. To date, Co-Lab Alpha participants were surveyed at the 12-month mark, and Co-Lab Beta Saint Paul College participants and partners were surveyed at 3 months. These follow-ups offer initial insights into post-program experiences, but represent a limited view of long-term trajectories.
- Self reported data can introduce response bias, variations in interpretation and incomplete recall. For the young adults, participation in surveys was strongly encouraged and in the case of Saint Paul College, incentivized via weekly raffles for completion. For partners, participation was voluntary, further contributing to potential nonresponse bias.

Continued data collection and longitudinal evaluation will be essential to building a more robust understanding of Co-Lab's outcomes over time.

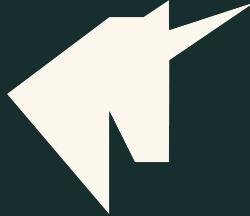
# Special Thanks

Our deepest gratitude to the young adults who participated in Co-Lab and shaped it with their honesty, creativity, and trust. Co-Lab exists because of them.

Special thanks to the community we share, which includes the Co-Lab Young Adult Advisory Council, Partner Advisory Council, NorthStars, Saint Paul College, Urban Ventures, and the community organizations and partners across the workforce development and education ecosystems, all who supported this work. We are also deeply grateful to Co-Lab's core service providers, vendors, and creative partners, who engaged Co-Lab young adults with great care.

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